

17. COLLECTION OF A RARE SNAKE IN THE NILGIRIS

While driving on the ghat road between Coonoor and Ooty (c. 6000 ft) on December 15th 1975 at 5 p.m. when it was cold and rainy, we found a DOR (dead on road) specimen of a small dark snake, (apparently a burrower) which was later identified by Prof. Carl Gans as *Xylophis perroteti*. It was evidently active just after dark and we were surprised that a snake would be abroad in the cold rain.

A few days later on the Woodlands Estate (5-4000 ft) we found another adult DOR specimen of this species. Searching under rocks in a small shola between the tea and coffee

fields we found 2 juvenile *Xylophis*. These were quite active and coiled around one's fingers while being handled. This is a genus rarely collected, perhaps because of its fondness for colder temperatures at which the average herpetologist would not consider collection worthwhile. It was interesting to note that Uropeltids of the genus *Plectrurus* were at this time plentiful in the same area under leaf debris at the edge of tea gardens. The optimum temperature requisites of these burrowers evidently determine their elevational distribution and periods of activity.

Serial No.	Scale Rows	Ventrals	Subcaudals	Anal	Length	Diameter	Sex
MSP-N-1	13	137	24 divided	Single	58 cm	13 mm	female
MSP-N-2	13	139	34 divided	Single	55 cm	15 mm	male
MSP-N-3	13	147	21 divided	Single	19 cm	7 mm	female
MSP-N-4	13	142	36 divided	Single	17 cm	5 mm	male
M. A. Smith	13	139-147	Male 27-28 Female 16-20	Single	55 cm		

MADRAS SNAKE PARK,
MADRAS-600 022,
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18. OBSERVATION ON THE FEEDING HABIT OF THE TREE SNAKE,
COMMON INDIAN BRONZE-BACK, *DENDRELAPHIS TRISTIS* (DAUDIN)

The following observations, were made on the feeding habits of a Bronze-back snake at Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa in the natural condition. The snake was seen on 5.iii.77 on a tree at a height of about 2.5 metres from the ground. It came down to about 1.5 metres above the ground on seeing a garden

lizard *Calotes versicolor* (Daudin) on a bush of about 0.75 m height near the tree. The snake jumped over accurately from the tree on to the lizard covering a distance of 0.75 m and caught hold of the middle of the lizard and climbed back on to the tree. There it gradually slipped its mouth hold towards

the head of the lizard and started swallowing it head first. The process of swallowing is the same as described in the feeding habit of King Cobra by Biswas, Acharjyo & Misra (1976). The snake took about 10 minutes for catching and swallowing the lizard.

This observation explains two facts in case of the tree snake, that they have good eye sight so that the prey, a garden lizard of body length 60 mm, could be detected from a distance of more than 2 metres. The second fact is ability to jump in case of tree snakes which use a gliding movement from a great height to a lower height as has been pointed out by Shebbeare (1939-40) in respect of two species *Chrysopelia ornata* (Shaw) and *Dendrophis pictus*

(Gmelin) [*Dendrelaphis tristis* (Daudin)] though Smith (1943) has doubted this ability in the present genus, 'That they can fly or plane as can *Chryopelea ornata*, has not yet been definitely established' and Wall (1910), 'So far as *tristis* is concerned, however, the evidence, though suggestive is not well authenticated'. It is generally accepted that the tree snakes which possess hinge type of ventrals are able to glide.

This snake is also known to feed in captivity (Wall 1910) on lizards and frogs but Shaw as mentioned by Shebbeare (loc. cit.) found it difficult to get them to feed in captivity and in another case Caldwell had to set free one because it refused to feed.

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